

# In Defense of Henry Slocum on July 1

Troy D. Harman

---

Major General Henry Warner Slocum has received criticism over the years for not marching to the battlefield more readily on July 1, 1863 to help the 1<sup>st</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Union corps in their defense of Gettysburg. The question most specifically on the minds of his critics is why his corps remained at Two Taverns, along the Baltimore Pike, during part of the afternoon phase of the first day's battle. Two Taverns is only five miles south of Gettysburg, and his 12<sup>th</sup> Corps was there by noon. One might imagine that if he had started his columns towards Gettysburg at that time, they should have reached the battlefield in time to extend the 11<sup>th</sup> Corps flank beyond the Harrisburg road easterly in the direction of the York road. A scenario such as this might have significantly altered the outcome of Confederate Lieutenant General Richard S. Ewell's attack up the Carlisle and Harrisburg roads as well as across the Mummasburg road on July 1. Similarly, Slocum could have strengthened the 1<sup>st</sup> Corps's defense of McPherson's Ridge, and possibly beaten back Major General A. P. Hill's main attack that afternoon.

Admittedly, it would be difficult to exonerate Slocum from his indecision around Two Taverns that afternoon, and it is an issue that will likely always draw criticism. However, this article is concerned with neither exonerating nor condemning Slocum on this particular issue, because in doing so, it is easy to miss the positive decisions that Slocum did make before the afternoon was complete. In other words, the story of Slocum at Two Taverns is an incomplete one, which overlooks significant actions taken by him on July 1. The story of his inactivity at Two Taverns omits his assistance given later to the Union 1<sup>st</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> corps during their retreat. It leaves out Slocum's check of Robert E. Lee's advance, and of his securing the Union line in an effective manner during the critical hours. So, while this article does not seek to absolve Slocum of all blame, neither does it dismiss the significant actions taken by him during the late afternoon and early evening of July 1, 1863.

Let us begin our investigation of Slocum's assistance with the Union 1<sup>st</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> corps retreat to Cemetery Hill during the late afternoon of July 1, 1863. As these two corps met there, General Slocum began consulting through an aide-de-camp with Major General Oliver O. Howard to learn where he might best help. Howard suggested that Slocum's corps extend the 1<sup>st</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> corps flanks to the right and left of Gettysburg. Slocum would also consult with Major General Winfield Scott Hancock for specifics on



***Maj. Gen. Henry Slocum. GNMP***

where to place the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division of his 12<sup>th</sup> Corps, along the far left. Meanwhile Slocum's 1<sup>st</sup> Division eventually found its way to a position that secured the army's right.

But there was more to Slocum's assistance than merely extending and securing the flanks of George Gordon Meade's army on July 1. On closer inspection, one finds that the 12<sup>th</sup> Corps commander went a step further and took precautions to establish a second line of defense south of the Cemetery Hill line. This second line was to serve as a contingency plan in the event the first line broke at Cemetery Hill. Understanding that Cemetery Hill was the key position that secured Union control of the Baltimore pike, the next hill down the pike offering the same security, at least temporarily, was Powers Hill. It was the next logical rallying point on the Baltimore pike had the 11<sup>th</sup> Corps retreated south from Cemetery Hill, which raises this bit of intrigue.

That is, the reader is likely aware of the question of what would have happened the evening of July 1 had Ewell assaulted Cemetery Hill. The follow-up query can be just as tiresome, as it ponders whether such an attack could have succeeded. Rehashing these questions is sometimes laborious, as many students of the battle know. However, there is another pertinent question to be asked: What would have taken place next had Ewell's attack upon Cemetery Hill succeeded? The answer is fresh and original -- and it is that, at least temporarily, Powers Hill would have constituted the bulwark of a second line of defense. The reason behind Slocum's decision to build his corps line around that hill can still be understood today when one stands on East Cemetery Hill and looks south down the Baltimore pike. Clearly, Powers Hill is the next hill in line of succession down the pike.

This raises the question of why the Baltimore pike should be considered so important that the 1<sup>st</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> corps would build their lines of defense around it at Cemetery Hill, and that Slocum would duplicate that line across the Baltimore pike one mile south at Powers Hill. The answer is that the Baltimore pike was the vital supply, communication, and transportation artery of the Union Army of the Potomac. The Taneytown and Emmitsburg roads were the other two major roads within the Union lines, but they did not quite compare in significance. Actually, of these two roads only the Taneytown road would remain in Union hands throughout the battle. The Emmitsburg road was lost after the Union retreat from the Peach Orchard Ridge on July 2. This setback would reduce Meade's avenues of retreat to only two significant roadways: the Baltimore pike and Taneytown road.

Besides being one of only two avenues of retreat maintained throughout the battle, the Baltimore pike was a vital link to so much more. For instance, the Baltimore pike connected twenty miles south, at Westminster with the Union Army's medical and food supply wagons, its telegraph connections to the War Department, and the Western Maryland Railroad. Beyond Westminster, the Baltimore pike led to Baltimore and Washington, D.C. As for the necessity of the Army of the Potomac staying connected with Westminster, Frederick Klein described the bustling activity there during the Gettysburg campaign. In vivid detail the historian explained that,

After taking over a covered wagon as a temporary office, [Brigadier-General Herman Haupt] soon arranged his plan for establishing a railroad supply depot [at Westminster]. Trains were to be guarded in convoys, with guards on all bridges. Four hundred men from the Railroad Construction Corps in Alexandria, Virginia, were ordered up with lanterns, buckets, and rails. Supplies of firewood for the locomotives were brought in and arrangements were made to bail water out of a nearby dam for the engines ... and soon thirty trains, moving in convoys of five trains at a time, were moving 150 cars daily to and from Baltimore and Westminster, over a railroad which previously had not carried

more than four trains per day. With these arrangements completed for supplies, Haupt turned his attention to railroad communications with the battlefield of Gettysburg.<sup>1</sup>

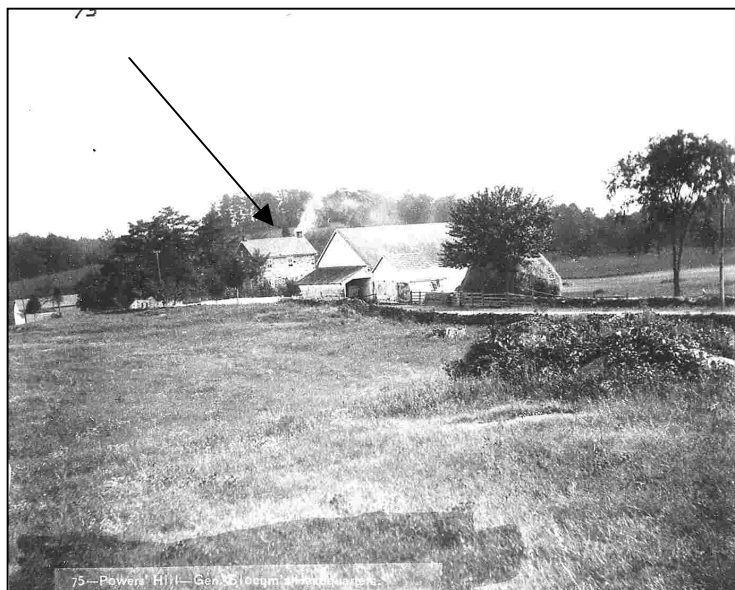
Again, protecting the Taneytown and Emmitsburg roads could not carry the same weight as holding onto the Baltimore pike. Granted, the Taneytown road did become the conduit for transporting most of the artillery reserve, and it represented one of only two escape routes in the event of disaster. Even so, any line of defense at Gettysburg had to center on and fortify the Baltimore pike. Cemetery Hill would become the key position primarily because it achieved this mission. Powers Hill was important partly because it reinforced this mission. General Meade's grandson later editorialized his grandfather's opinion on the matter. Meade would write that 12<sup>th</sup> Corps troops in "following the pike, abutted on the very rear of Cemetery Hill."<sup>2</sup> Since "abut" may mean, "to touch along a border with a projecting part," Meade fittingly described the Baltimore pike's relationship to both Cemetery and Powers hills the evening of July 1.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps Captain George A. Thayer, 2<sup>nd</sup> Massachusetts Infantry, best summarized this relationship in an 1886 address to Union veterans, when he said that,

The Twelfth Corps was now moving upon the Baltimore Turnpike, which ran directly over the crest of Cemetery Hill, the highway to the Nation's capital, the point of the most strategic importance in the battle-field, the army's roadway of retreat.<sup>4</sup>

Aside from the fact that the Baltimore pike had to be protected thoroughly, and beyond the visual evidence that Powers Hill was a natural defensive position down the pike, one might still ask what evidence there is that Slocum created a second line of defense centered on this hill. Colonel George A. Cobham, Jr., who led a brigade within Brigadier General John W. Geary's 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, shed some light on this. Substituting for Brigadier General Thomas Kane on July 1, Cobham led the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade forward from Two Taverns to the battlefield, via the Baltimore pike during the late afternoon. Cobham's task was to have his men march that day,

... by the Baltimore Turnpike to Two Taverns, and from there to about two miles from Gettysburg, where the brigade was placed in position by direction of Brigadier General Geary, Commanding Division -- on the crest of a hill overlooking part of the battlefield, and in support of a battery stationed on the hill, here the troops lay on their arms during the night.<sup>5</sup>

The hill in question here is Powers Hill, where Cobham's or Kane's brigade was positioned for the night, remaining there well into the early hours of July 2. The men slept on their arms and were supported by two artillery guns during their tenure. It is often assumed that Cobham's account is a reference to Little Round Top. This is easy to confuse because it is imagined that Geary's entire division marched in that direction on July

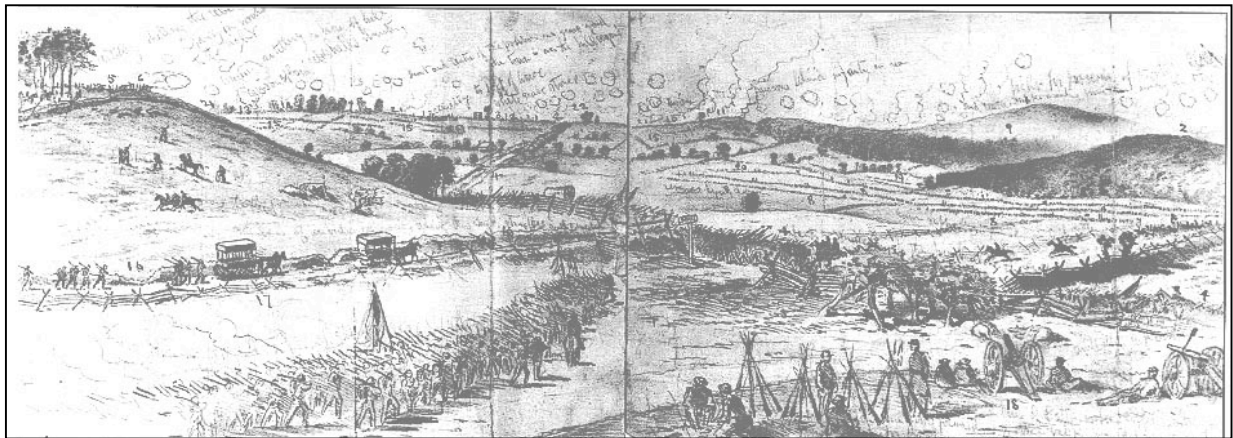


*An 1898 Tipton view from McAllister field toward Power's Hill. The Nathaniel Lightner farm and Baltimore Pike are in the foreground. The arrow is pointing to Power's Hill. GNMP*

1.

The confusion is also heightened by Cobham's mention of a "hill overlooking part of the battlefield." Since Powers Hill is covered with trees today, it is not easy to picture this hill as a point of visibility for part of the battlefield. However, in July 1863, Powers Hill was open on the eastern, northern, and western sides. It was so open that General Meade observed some of the July 3 cannonade from its summit. Furthermore, General Slocum's headquarters and signal station were located there throughout the battle. It is likely that the signal station at Powers Hill factored into Meade's decision to ride there on July 3. This hill then gave Meade and Slocum communication and visibility with most of the Union line.

One might add that Major General George Sykes also had his headquarters on Powers Hill for most of July 2, and General Meade's first view of the battlefield on July 1 might have been from there. Edwin Forbes captured the great visibility and central location of this hill in his sketch done possibly on July 3. While standing on Zion Hill, a comparable view immediately south of Powers Hill, Forbes could easily trace the landscape. From right to left, the high ground of McAllister's Hill, Wolf Hill, Spangler Hill, Culp's Hill, McKnight's Knoll, East Cemetery Hill, and part of West Cemetery Hill were in plain view. Had Forbes stood on the northwestern crest of Powers Hill, then Cemetery Ridge and possibly the Round Tops would have come into view as well.



*Edwin Forbes sketch showing Powers Hill on the left, Cemetery Hill in the distance to its right, and the Baltimore Pike in the foreground and middle ground. LC*

Therefore when Cobham stepped off the Baltimore pike and onto, "the crest of the hill overlooking part of battlefield" he was describing the more open Powers Hill of 1863. Brigadier General John W. Geary clarified this when he recorded that,

[Cobham's] Second Brigade with two pieces of [Lieutenant David H. Kinzie's] Battery K, Fifth U.S. Artillery, pursuant to orders from Major-General Slocum, was detached during the march to take position in reserve on the immediate left of the turnpike, about 2 miles from Gettysburg. ... The command rested on their arms during the night.<sup>6</sup>

Again, the position "on the immediate left of the turnpike about 2 miles from Gettysburg" is Powers Hill. This finer point, in review, is often missed for two reasons. First, it is usually assumed that Geary's entire division moved to the vicinity of the Round Tops. Secondly, one has trouble today picturing Powers Hill as a mostly open position. Concerning the Round Tops, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> brigades of Geary's division, as will be seen, did march in that direction, but Cobham's 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade stayed at Powers Hill to defend the Union center and right.

Besides the accounts written by Cobham and Geary, there is more evidence that Slocum established a bulwark or central position at Powers Hill on July 1. Captain Charles P. Horton, who moved with the brunt of Geary's division over Patterson-Weikert Hill and into Plum Run Valley on the far left, also noted Cobham's presence at Powers Hill. He observed that while, "coming up with the reserve artillery and the ordinance train parked on the left of the [Baltimore] pike, the 2d Brigade (Kane) was detached to its support..."<sup>7</sup>

Horton seemed to realize that Cobham's or Kane's brigade was posted at Powers Hill in part to guard the reserve artillery and ordinance train, which was gradually arriving. Although the field south of Powers Hill would come to be known as "Artillery Park," it is likely that only two batteries and a few ammunition wagons were present with Cobham that afternoon. Actually, most of the reserve artillery was north of Taneytown by the early evening of July 1 preparing to encamp, "... on the Taneytown road, near the cross-road leading to Two Taverns."<sup>8</sup> Eight of those batteries were advanced before sundown to the battlefield to be used by General Hancock. Meanwhile Major Freeman McGilvery's reserve guns held up the rear in Taneytown. His guns were the last to arrive at Powers Hill, "... with the ammunition train about 10:30 A.M." on July 2.<sup>9</sup>

It is no small point that the area of Powers Hill became both the artillery park for the army, and an ambulance park for the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> corps. In this sense, Slocum's Hill, as Powers Hill was called during the battle, became the logistical center for the Union Army at Gettysburg. As for the importance of such a center, Thomas Merchant of the 84<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Regiment reminded his readers that, "The Supply Trains were an important factor in army organization. They did good service in the camp, along the march, and on the field. Without them even Gettysburg would not have been a Field of Monuments."<sup>10</sup> It is not an accident that much of the army's reserve ammunition and artillery and many of its ambulances were kept there. That it became the stockroom of Meade's army was both logical and intentional for three reasons.

There is a term from the field of military science to explain the three reasons behind the army's selection of Powers Hill. The U.S. Army calls it KOCO or OCOKA, an acronym for the army's system for analyzing terrain for military operations. K stands for key terrain, terrain that must be held to control the battlefield. The two O's are for observation and obstacles. C is for cover and concealment, and A is avenues of approach. Although the acronym KOCO did not exist in 1863, Civil War commanders understood its concepts and employed them on the battlefields of the Civil War.

Let us begin with "avenues of approach" as it relates to Powers Hill. When commanding officers such as General Meade and Major General Slocum considered where to place their miles of wheeled vehicles, they first looked for roads of access and egress. Reserve artillery, ammunition trains, and ambulances all needed hard-bed roads to move toward a battlefield, around it, and away from it. The strategic reason behind the battle being fought at Gettysburg in the first place was because of its great crossroad status. More to the point though, once the Union line assumed its cul-de-sac shape, Powers Hill became an essential transportation juncture and connector to all points.

Let us be clear here. When one examines the shape of Meade's battle line, basic geometry must be applied. An elliptical, semi-circle, arc, curved, or fan-shaped defensive line offers the shortest distance between two points along the line. Meade's army had this advantage, and the fixed equidistant point inside this arc or curve, where communication and transportation lines intersected, became Powers Hill. If a chord, for instance, were to connect Wolf Hill on the Union right and Little Round Top on the left, Powers Hill would fall in the middle of that chord. In short, the shortest line between almost any two points on the Union line ran through Powers Hill.

In military terms, the Army of the Potomac had interior lines, so that they could always follow the most direct routes to any point on the arc. Since Powers Hill remained at the epicenter of this arc, it became not only the point that everyone traversed in route to somewhere, but it naturally surfaced as the point of distribution for ammunition supplies, reserve artillery, ambulances, and corps waiting in reserve.

Powers Hill then constituted the shortest distance from the base in any direction. General Henry J. Hunt stated it this way: "The Artillery Reserve and its large trains were parked in a central position on a cross-road from the Baltimore pike to the Taneytown road."<sup>11</sup> Through the editing of General Meade's

letters and papers, his son characterized the general's view of Powers Hill to be the place where, "the Artillery Reserve and its large trains were parked in a central position between the two flanks of the army, in the rear of Powers Hill, on a road connecting the Baltimore pike and the Taneytown road."<sup>12</sup> The crossroad mentioned here by both Hunt and Meade, which did not appear on their maps, was Granite Schoolhouse Lane.

"Cover and concealment" was also a dynamic in Powers or Slocum's Hill becoming the logistical center for the Union Army at Gettysburg. At 456 feet, the hill provided extra assurance that the train of vehicles might safely be guarded from any vista gained by Lee's signalmen. Further buffering Confederate lines of sight toward Benner's Hill were McAllister's Hill and Wolf Hill to the east. Likewise, Cemetery Ridge, Patterson-Weikert Hill, and the Round Tops helped block Confederate observation points from the west and north at Bream's Hill, Herr Ridge, the Lutheran Seminary cupola, the Linean Hall cupola, the Alms House cupola, and Oak Hill.

"Key terrain," is another facet of the significance of Powers Hill. Really every positive stated about the hill to this point is part of why Powers Hill was key terrain, and the most important of these bears repeating. That is, Powers Hill sat squarely on the Baltimore pike and extended west trailing off near the Taneytown road. Had the Union line broken anywhere, Powers Hill would have been the position where Meade's army literally "circled the wagons." They would have had to do so to assure an orderly retreat down the Baltimore pike.

Therefore, Slocum anchored the right of Geary's division upon Powers Hill. Cobham's 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade carried out this assignment by marching from Two Taverns during the afternoon of July 1, before resting on its arms atop the summit that evening. Had the 11<sup>th</sup> Corps broken at Cemetery Hill around 4:15 to 5:00 P.M., Cobham's men were there, in the line of retreat, waiting to create a rallying point.<sup>13</sup> They were on high ground, shielding the Baltimore pike, which functioned as the army's main line of communication and transportation. Moreover, Cobham's brigade held a key position that covered and concealed a field soon to become the stockroom of supply and service for Meade's army.

Slocum and Geary would attempt to improve this line as more of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division came up the Baltimore pike and arrived at its intersection with McAllister Mill Road to the east and Granite Schoolhouse Lane to the west. When George S. Greene's 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade found this juncture, it turned left from the Baltimore pike onto Granite Schoolhouse Lane and marched by a few wheeled artillery vehicles, which were either parked or moving into the field on the left. Captain Charles P. Horton then documented that

Here [Greene's] 3d Brigade formed in line of battalions in mass, and supported by the 1<sup>st</sup> (Candy's) moved over a small but rocky hill [Patterson-Weikert Hill] in our front descending the slope on the other side, Knapp's Pa. Battery passing around by some road [Weikert Lane] came up and took position on a knoll on our right.<sup>14</sup>

Horton describes here the movement of the rest of Geary's division toward the Union left. Slocum had consulted with Hancock and learned that the left of the 1<sup>st</sup> Corps needed to be extended south. Greene's 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, followed closely by Charles Candy's 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, marched along the schoolhouse lane, at least temporarily, in that direction. They marched passed Cobham's troops, beyond the congestion of a few reserve pieces and wagons, which perhaps were part of Hunt's secret stash, and then west toward the Taneytown road. Either they remained on the schoolhouse road or debouched at some point into the fields south and walked alongside the road. In both cases, they would have marched perpendicular to the Taneytown road, before traversing it toward the base of a rocky ridge, which was juxtaposed to the road.

For many students of the battle, Horton's "rocky hill" or ridge is a familiar feature on the landscape, yet it is terrain without an official name. It is the ridge staggered slightly behind and south of Cemetery Ridge and is linked with Little Round Top on its northeastern slope. Because it is neither Cemetery Ridge nor Little Round Top, even those reasonably familiar with the battle have struggled to know precisely what to call it. Out of necessity perhaps, some have occasionally identified it with the southernmost extension of

Cemetery Ridge. However, the latter ceases to exist immediately south of the current location of the Pennsylvania Memorial, where it becomes a drainage area.

Out of frustration, understandably, most students of the battle resort to calling it “the hill back there.” The danger in leaving this rocky hill in anonymity is that it becomes easy to dismiss or confuse it with Little Round Top, when reading certain accounts. To avoid doing it a disservice, this rise is likely best identified with the farms of William Patterson and George Weikert, east and west of the ridge. Therefore, it was Patterson-Weikert Hill, perhaps near its connection with Little Round Top, where Greene’s and Candy’s brigades climbed over. Once on the other side, two-thirds of Geary’s division had reached the far Union left.

Between his three brigades, Geary reported that by 5 P.M. “... my line extended at that time from about half a mile west of the Baltimore turnpike to the left of the First Army Corps, to a range of hills south and west of the town ...”<sup>15</sup> The key words here are “extended ... from ... the Baltimore turnpike,” which is Geary’s reference to his line beginning at Powers Hill on the Baltimore pike before stretching west and southwest. The “range of hills south and west of the town,” designates his eventual overall position extending from Powers Hill on the right around to Patterson-Weikert Hill on the left and down to Little Round Top slightly southwest.

So one might say that Geary’s division was more spread out than is sometimes imagined, with the right of his division anchored on Powers Hill and the left upon the northern slope of Little Round Top. Late that afternoon Lieutenant Charles A. Atwell’s (Knapp’s) Pennsylvania Battery was situated on a knoll near Round Top supporting Geary’s left, while two pieces of Lieutenant David H. Kinzie’s Battery K, 5<sup>th</sup> U.S. Artillery did the same on the right at Powers Hill.

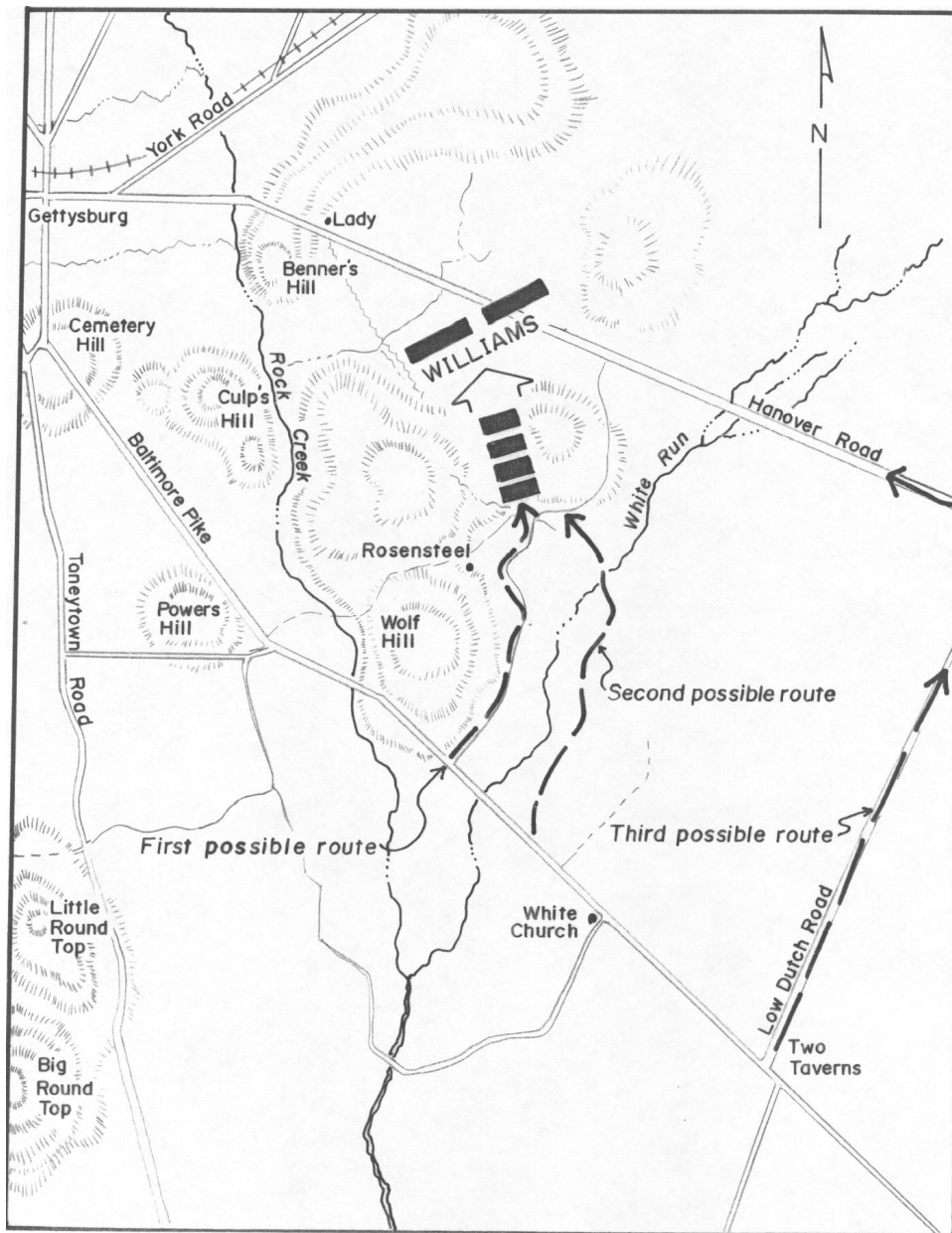
Geary’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was not the only representative of Slocum’s corps attempting to secure the Union line during the late afternoon and early evening of July 1. Prior to 4 P.M., Brigadier General Alpheus Williams’s 1<sup>st</sup> Division, which by July 2 was turned over to Brigadier General Thomas Ruger, veered northeast from the Baltimore pike and moved around Wolf Hill to Hanover Road. Williams recalled that, “Before reaching Rock Creek the First Division was directed to the right, following a crossroad to the Hanover Road.”<sup>16</sup> Lieutenant Edward D. Muhlenberg, commanding the artillery brigade of the 12<sup>th</sup> Corps, noted, “About noon of the same day [July 1], the two batteries attached to it moved with the First Division away from the pike in a northeasterly direction toward the Hanover road, and, approaching Gettysburg from the east ...”<sup>17</sup> Ruger stated that in “... bearing to the right at a point about 2 miles from Gettysburg [his division] gained a position threatening the left flank of the enemy...”<sup>18</sup> Colonel Charles Morse of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Massachusetts Infantry remembered it this way:

The XII Corps, commanded by Major-General H.W. Slocum, reached Two Taverns, on the Baltimore pike, about two miles from Gettysburg, toward four o’clock in the afternoon of July 1. ... After a short halt the corps was moved to the right across country east of Rock Creek, until it faced a slope toward Benner’s Hill.<sup>19</sup>

What Williams, Muhlenberg, Ruger, and Morse meant here was that the 1<sup>st</sup> Division circled east and north, from the Baltimore pike around to the Hanover road from the eastern side of town, and moved toward Gettysburg from that direction. Staff officers had reported to Williams the existence of “... a high bare hill on the right of the road from which the town, and the masses of rebel columns were plainly to be seen, and that a large rebel force was massing, apparently with a purpose to occupy it.”<sup>20</sup> In another account, Williams referred to his mission that afternoon as, “... for the purpose of seizing upon a commanding position easterly of the town of Gettysburg.”<sup>21</sup>

Using Wolf Hill to conceal its movements, the 1<sup>st</sup> Division would come upon the Hanover road, turn toward town, and soon be within view of Benner’s Hill, which crosses Hanover road. Moving through the former hill to the base of the latter hill, the division found itself partially right of the Hanover road and either on or facing the Daniel Lady farm. This farm would become a position of cover and concealment for Major General Edward Johnson’s Confederate division starting that evening around 7 P.M.

However, by 4:30 P.M., the time when Williams's division likely reached the Lady property, Johnson's Confederates were still working their way from west of Gettysburg, around the north end of town.



*Movements of William's division, 12<sup>th</sup> Corps, on July 1.*

Perhaps as early as 6:30 P.M., the front of the Confederate column crossed York road and began to ascend Benner's Hill from the opposite slope. Williams did not mention that he was specifically aware of Johnson's nearing presence, or of a brigade from Major General Jubal A. Early's division assigned to watch the York road. However, in general terms he described his belief that Confederates were within close proximity to Benner's Hill. Williams recounted that

I accordingly directed General Ruger to deploy his brigade, under the cover of woods [of Wolf Hill], and charge [Benner's] hill, supported by the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade under Col. [Archibald] McDougall. I had with me two batteries of artillery [Muhlenberg's Brigade],



which were put in the road, and directed to follow the assault, come into battery on the crest of the hill, and open on the enemy's masses. Ruger's brigade was actually ascending the slope of the hill, when I received orders to withdraw the division along toward the Baltimore Pike, and take position for the night.<sup>22</sup>

Geary went as far as to claim that, "The appearance of the [first] division in this position at the time it occurred was apparently a timely diversion in favor of our forces, as the farther advance of the enemy ceased."<sup>23</sup>

The statements and claims made here by Williams and Ruger are noteworthy. First, they suggest that the 1<sup>st</sup> Division of the Union 12<sup>th</sup> Corps was positioned near the Hanover road during the late afternoon of July 1, 1863. Williams informed the reader in an earlier part of the same account that his men were there in search of a "high bare hill" to the right of "Bonaughtown Pike," or Hanover Road, from which they could threaten Confederate forces below in the town.<sup>24</sup>

His account goes on to clarify this hill to be Benner's Hill, and he states that he ordered Ruger's brigade to take it. Support was to come from Colonel Archibald L. McDougall's brigade, with cover from Lt. Charles E. Winegar's four New York guns, and Lt. Sylvanus T. Rugg's Battery B, 4<sup>th</sup> U.S. Artillery. According to Williams, Ruger's brigade was "actually ascending the slope of the hill," when the division was recalled back to the Baltimore pike somewhere between 5:30 to 6 P.M.<sup>25</sup>

The second part to these two accounts, which is most intriguing, is Geary's implication that his division's presence around the Hanover road late that afternoon might have affected Ewell's decision to not attack Cemetery Hill on July 1. Harry W. Pfanz, in his *Gettysburg: Culp's Hill and Cemetery Hill*, has dismissed this possibility partly because Confederate rumors placed Union troops on the York road instead of the Hanover road.<sup>26</sup> Pfanz is right in believing that at least Early was informed that the threat was coming from the York pike. After all, that is where Brigadier General William Smith's Virginia brigade and later Brigadier General John B. Gordon's Georgia brigade, both from Early's division, were dispatched.

Campbell Brown, of Ewell's staff, elaborated in his papers in 1869 on the circumstances by which Confederate troops were sent off toward the York road. In describing the moments of the Union 11<sup>th</sup> Corps's retreat through town on July 1, he recollected that as, "... Early moved forward ... he sent one brigade under 'Extra Billy' Smith to his left rear to prevent the approach of the enemy in that direction."<sup>27</sup> Notice here that Brown did not specifically mention the York road, but rather described Smith's deployment generally as protecting the "left rear." This is perhaps a minor point, but it leaves open a broader interpretation for the Union 12<sup>th</sup> Corps's whereabouts late that afternoon.

Further along in his account, Brown depicted Ewell's supreme moment of decision. He explained that

By the time we got into the town, the enemy had crowned the top of Cemetery Hill with a battery supported by quite a long line of infantry & opened on us in the hollow. Riding forward, Gen'l Ewell & Early surveyed the ground & examined the position & force on Cemetery Hill. Having concluded to attack, if Hill concurred, Gen'l Ewell ordered Early & Rodes to get ready. Just then up came "Freddy" Smith, son of "Extra Billy" to say that a heavy force was reported coming up in their rear. Early said to Gen'l Ewell, "Gen'l, I don't much believe in this, but prefer to suspend my movements until I can send & inquire into it."<sup>28</sup>

Early had his own version of this pivotal moment remembering that

In a very short time Colonel Smead, of Ewell's staff, came to me and informed me that Ewell had sent him to tell me that Johnson was coming up, and to ask where I thought he ought to be put. The enemy just about this time commenced a furious fire from his artillery all around. While Colonel Smead and myself were having a hurried conversation about the subject of his message, with the shells bursting around us, the aide of General

Smith came to me in a gallop and under great excitement, and told me that General Smith said the enemy was advancing on the York road with infantry, artillery, and cavalry, and he could not hold him back. General Smith had not obeyed my order when I sent for him by reason of the report of an advance on that road.<sup>29</sup>

In looking at these two accounts, that of Brown and Early, it becomes apparent that Confederate worries centered on the danger of being flanked around their left rear, as they pursued Union forces through the town. Consequently, Smith's brigade and later Gordon's brigade were placed on or near the York road for security reasons. Smith's brigade was assigned there initially as a precautionary measure, but the dispatching of Gordon's brigade to the York road was in direct response to the sighting of Union forces.

Another noteworthy point that may be gleaned from Early's reminiscences is that Ewell wanted Early to advise him on where to place Johnson. Early's hand in this decision, helps explain why Johnson marched out across the York road and over Benner's Hill in route to the Daniel Lady farm. In doing so, Johnson relieved Smith and Gordon from the York road, while assuming the duties of securing the Confederate left flank. Interestingly, Johnson marched directly toward the position recently vacated by Williams, likely the scene of the reported threat.

In light of Brown and Early's explanations, it is understandable that Pfanz would be firm in believing Confederate rumors focused on the York road rather than the Hanover road, where Williams's division had first turned toward Gettysburg. A clear distinction has been made then between the Hanover and York roads, leaving battlefield enthusiasts to wonder if there was any correlation between Williams's flanking maneuver and Ewell's fear of being flanked late that afternoon. Even with the glaring discrepancy of two separate roads, there is a plausible explanation that might clear up some confusion.

The explanation must be traced back to an earlier event beginning with Williams's first view of Benner's Hill from the open valley below. In taking advantage of this vista, he would write that, "I could see on the top [of Benner's Hill], mounted rebel officers, evidently reconnoitering."<sup>30</sup> Likewise, Colonel Charles F. Morse, 2<sup>nd</sup> Massachusetts Infantry, recounted that the 1<sup>st</sup> Division marched, "... until it faced a slope towards Benner's Hill, where the line was halted and deployed with skirmishers in front. The country here was open, and mounted officers of the enemy could be seen on the high ground apparently examining the position."<sup>31</sup>

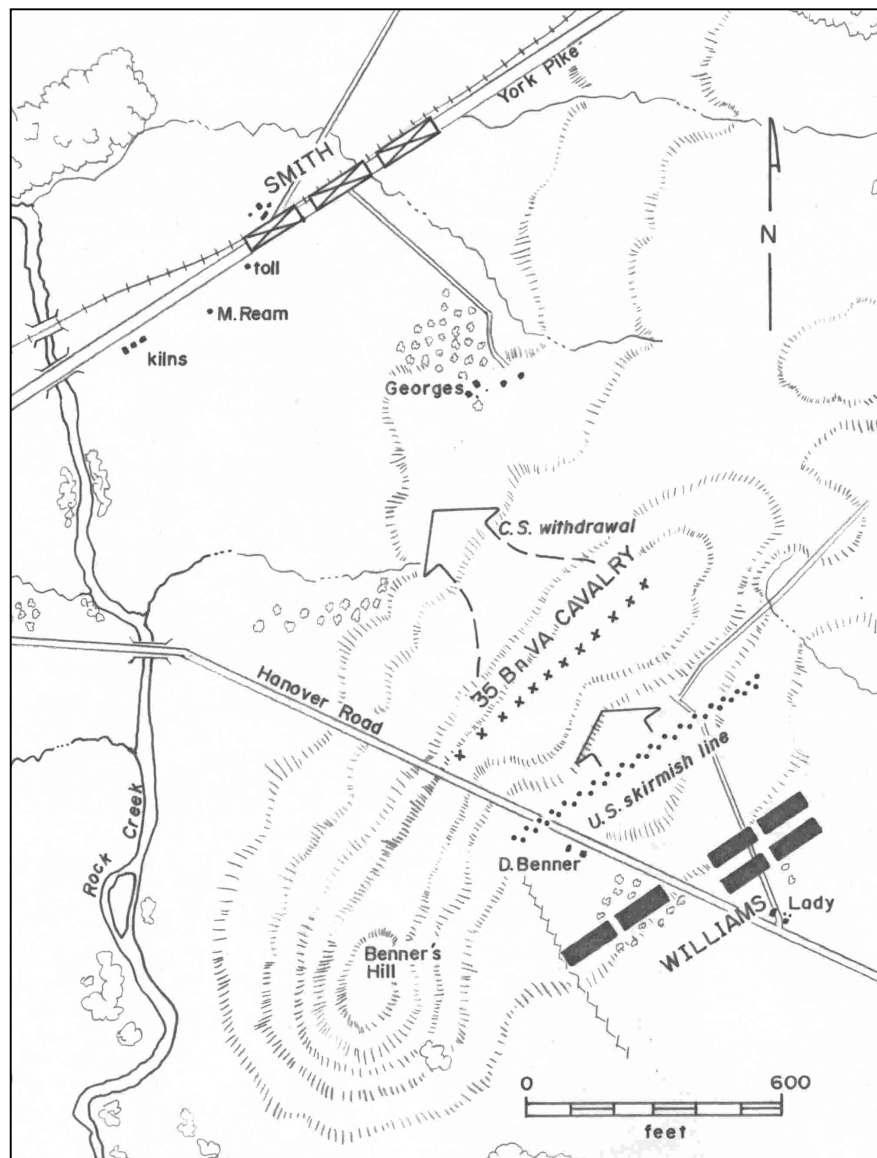
In keeping with these two accounts, the first step to clearing up confusion about phantom reports of Union troops advancing on the York road begins with the recognition that mounted rebel officers were atop Benner's Hill. Not only were they there, but they were, "examining the position," or "reconnoitering" it. Now, if they were reconnoitering, as Williams believed, then it is important to realize that they were not staring down at the ground. Similarly, "examining the position" does not imply here that Confederates turned a blind eye to their surroundings at the expense of examining Benner's Hill.

To the contrary, those who reconnoiter are to observe the entirety of their environment with a careful eye. Being mounted, as they were, allowed for even better visibility and mobility, giving cause to believe that they were prepared to scout the area. Conceivably, one or more were outfitted with glasses or binoculars as well. The point to all of this is that the mounted Confederate officers were as well-equipped to see Williams's men as the other way around. If Williams's division was detected in whole or in part, then the rumor of Union forces coming in on the York road might have begun here. Along these lines, Colonel Silas Colgrove of the 27<sup>th</sup> Indiana Infantry indicated that the "enemy's mounted skirmishers" detected them when he recorded that

By the time the [27<sup>th</sup> Indiana] regiment had reached a ravine or small creek [largely on the Lady farm], thickly skirted with undergrowth, at the foot of the hill, my skirmishers had nearly reached the crest of the [Benner's] hill occupied by the enemy, who had retired as my skirmishers advanced.<sup>32</sup>

The skeptic might reply here that even if the 12<sup>th</sup> Corps's movements were spotted or contested near the Hanover road, it is still invalid to presume that these columns were the source of a rumor, because they did not appear on the York road. On the surface this appears to be true, but there is a logical hypothesis to be found here too. First we can be reasonably sure that Williams's 12<sup>th</sup> Corps troops approached Benner's Hill to the right or north of Hanover Road via the Daniel Lady property.<sup>33</sup> In crossing this property they would have come across a 1740s road running northwest, which stopped just short of connecting with a 1780s road that led directly north to the York pike.<sup>34</sup>

Had they followed this road all the way, they would have found the York pike to be only about five hundred yards from the crest of Benner's Hill. A remnant of that road, known as Natural Springs Road, exists today as an exit from Giant Food store down to Arby's restaurant and onto York Road. This is likely the same road that Johnson's division of Ewell's Corps followed in reverse to the Daniel Lady farm. Perhaps some of Johnson's advanced guard reached the crest of Benner's Hill only thirty minutes after the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, 12<sup>th</sup> Corps withdrew from the area. From a Union standpoint, had any of Williams's skirmishers crested the top of Benner's Hill, the York road would have appeared clearly being less than a quarter of a mile to the north.



*Advance of Williams's division across the Lady Farm to Benner's Hill.*

There is a hang-up here too that needs to be addressed. It is the sticking point over the word "on" as it relates to a large Union force "advancing on the York road."<sup>35</sup> When Early stated the rumors as such, it is easy to assume that he was informed that enemy troops were literally "upon" that road. However, "on" has several different meanings and one of them is "towards." "Onward" from which "on" is derived means just that. For example, during the Civil War it was common to hear such expressions as, "guide on the colors," "on to Richmond," "marching on the capital," and "moving on Gettysburg." In each of these instances, "on" means "towards." Likewise, "advancing on the York road" probably meant advancing "towards" the York Road. "Up" and "down" the road were terms more carefully chosen then to describe movements literally upon a road. It is doubtful that Smith would have staid where he was along the York Road if Union forces were indeed already upon the road with him.

Let us review. Because the historian is required to provide a plausible hypothesis where direct evidence is missing, the most likely Union division candidate for such a Confederate rumor was the one belonging to Williams. Again, there was no other body of Union troops near the York road to qualify for this rumor except that of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, 12<sup>th</sup> Corps. Even so, there is still room for thought.

Returning to the issue of exactly where the 1<sup>st</sup> Division scaled Benner's Hill is of importance here and deserves a closer inspection. For starters, it is probable that the men of the 12<sup>th</sup> Corps faced Benner's Hill to the north side of the Hanover road. Along these lines, Williams informed John Bachelder that when his "staff officers [were] sent forward, [they] reported to me a high bare hill on the *right of the road* [italics mine] from which the town, and the masses of rebel columns were plainly to be seen."<sup>36</sup> David L. and Audrey J. Ladd, when editing *The Bachelder Papers*, interpreted this reference "right of the road," to be either an ambiguous statement made by Williams or a mistake. In the fifteenth footnote of their annotated citations, for instance, they claimed that Benner's Hill, "... is south, not north, of Hanover Road."<sup>37</sup> Understandably, they interpreted Benner's Hill to exist strictly on the left or south of the Hanover road because the National Park Service has emphasized it that way.

From a property-line standpoint this may be correct, however, the geographic ridgeline of Benner's Hill does not stop at the Hanover road. Instead it traverses the road, from left to right, and continues well onto the north side, beyond the current placement of Lieutenant Colonel William Nelson's Confederate artillery battalion. There is little doubt that taking the entire hill was Williams's objective, but the commanding point of Benner's Hill was north of Hanover Road, where the bluish reservoir tower is located today. In an oral statement to Bachelder, Williams would later confirm that his intention was that of "... advancing at once to take possession of Benner's Hill and the ridge north of it."<sup>38</sup> Lest there be any confusion on this point Williams clarified that, "The position occupied by Johnson's division on the night of the first was also the objective point of the First Division, Twelfth Corps..."<sup>39</sup> Johnson's division rested that night on the north side of the Hanover Road.

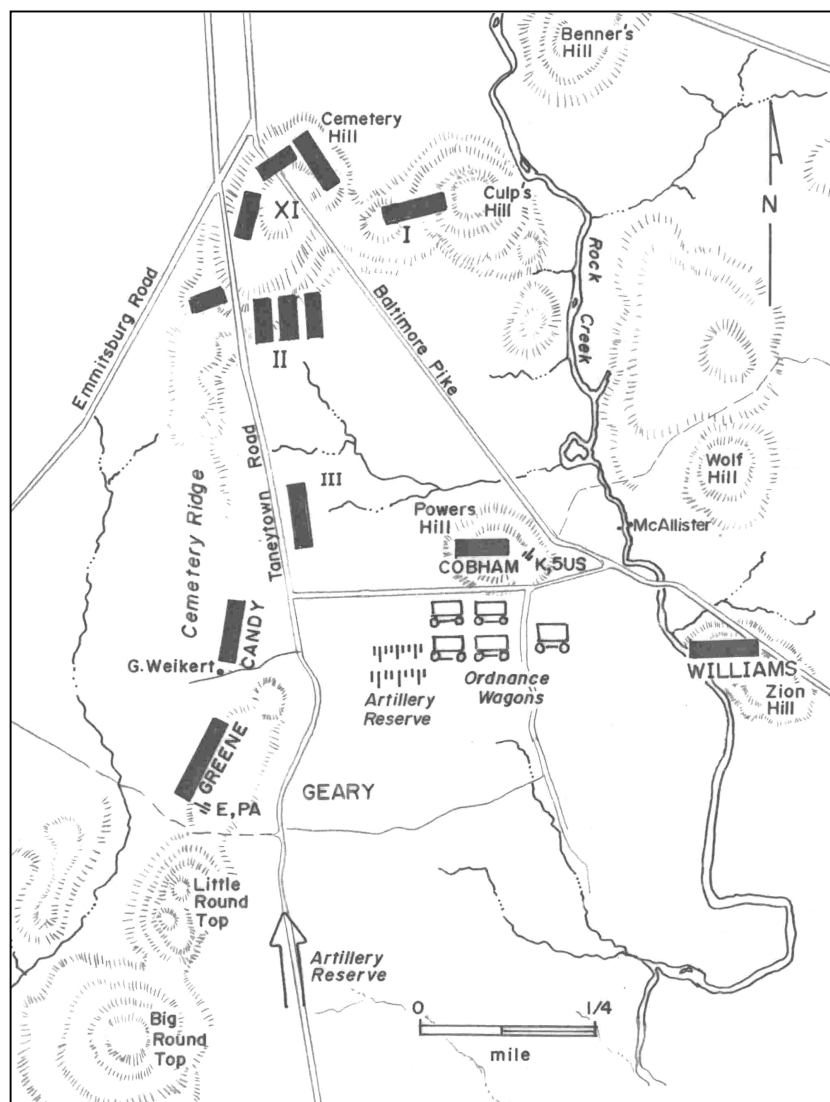
If then Williams's troops were ascending Benner's Hill on the right or north side of Hanover Road, then they were actually between the Hanover and York roads. Perhaps unknowingly, they were marching straight for the York road, and likely on course for the brick kiln along modern-day Coster Avenue. This was the point where Brigadier General Harry T. Hays and Colonel Isaac Avery's brigades collectively had presented their left flank about an hour earlier. Moreover, these 12<sup>th</sup>-Corps troops were within easy reach of Smith's and Gordon's brigades along the York road, and it is almost certain that the mounted rebel officers, which Williams's skirmishers contested, belonged to the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Virginia Cavalry.<sup>40</sup>

In any case, Williams began withdrawing his division after 5:30 P.M., retracing his steps back to the Baltimore pike, and likely placed them on Zion Hill. Zion Hill is immediately southeast of both Powers and McAllister's hills, and runs astride the Baltimore pike. Today, it is the hill that both overlooks the Gettysburg outlet mall and provides a view of that part of the battlefield. More than likely, Williams's division came out onto Zion Hill by way of the same primitive road used earlier in reverse.

With Williams's return, the 12<sup>th</sup> Corps fully covered that area between the Baltimore pike and the Round Tops on the evening of July 1. Interestingly, since the Baltimore pike slanted considerably southeast from Powers to Zion Hill, Williams found his division naturally in right echelon to Cobham's brigade of Geary's division.

All in all, Slocum's corps constituted a second line of defense for the Union army built around the Baltimore pike with the salient position at Powers Hill. Specifically, his defensive line was U-shaped, like the one in front occupied by the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> Union corps further north. From left to right, the 12<sup>th</sup> Corps arched from Little Round Top slightly northeast to Patterson-Weikert Hill and over the apex of Powers Hill, where the line cut back at a seventy-degree angle southeast, below McAllister's Hill to Zion Hill.

Slocum's two divisions were in place by nightfall and would hold their semi-circular line until morning. At daybreak, the corps gradually began to pull back from the left and consolidate along the right on Culp's, Spangler, McAllister, Powers, and Wolf hills. Perhaps it is a minor point, but for the record, it is of some importance that the Union right flank never ended at Culp's Hill. Depending on the day of the battle in question, the location of the right flank fluctuated. On July 1, it was on Zion Hill, while on July 3 it stretched across to Wolf Hill. Taking into account these positions and the brigades that defended them, it is a misnomer to use the term fishhook when describing the shape of Meade's line. Horseshoe is a more appropriate metaphor, if accuracy is the objective.



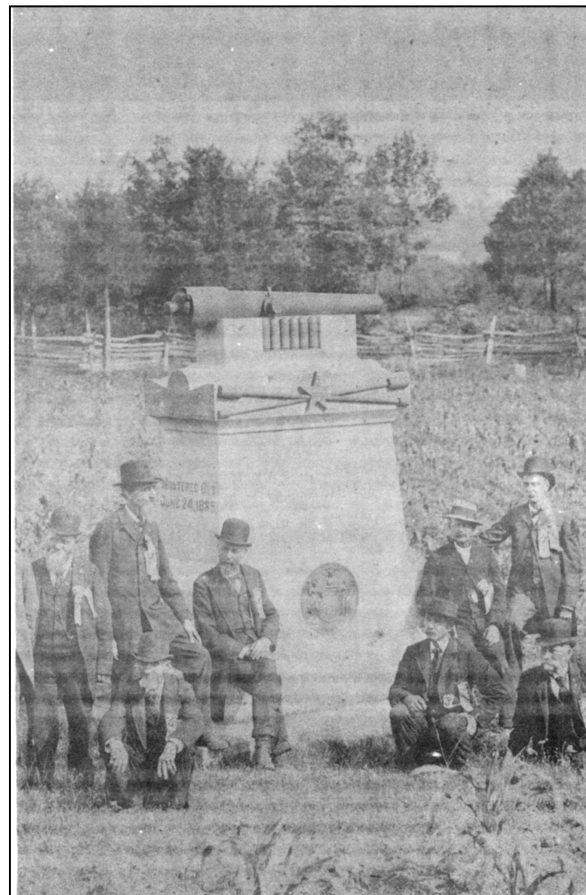
*The deployment of the Army of the Potomac late on July 1, illustrating Slocum's second interior line of defense around Power's Hill.*

But going back to the central point, Slocum's corps had completed an eventful and beneficial day. Geary's division had established a position at Powers Hill, which would function as the site for the artillery reserve, ammunition train, and ambulances for three corps; a central signal station; headquarters for Slocum, Sykes, and temporarily, for Meade; a central point of distribution; and the revolving door for transportation and communication. Furthermore, in the uncertainty of the afternoon of July 1, Powers Hill provided a second rallying point on the Baltimore pike in the event that the Cemetery Hill defenses broke. Since the 11<sup>th</sup> Corps line held, it is easy to forget that the 12<sup>th</sup> Corps had its back and flanks covered.

Lastly and of utmost importance is the realization that Williams's division deliberately sought to threaten Ewell's left flank as the latter pursued the Union 11<sup>th</sup> Corps through town. Williams did this by looking intentionally for a high bare hill to the right of the Hanover road, overlooking the York road. If one stands on Barlow's or Blocher's Knoll today and surveys the view to the south from a Confederate perspective, Benner's Hill is in plain view. In a quick glance, one can quickly grasp why Early would be worried about his rear enough to dispatch Smith's brigade to the York road. Even before the mounted Confederates of the 35<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Virginia Cavalry withdrew before Williams's skirmish line, Early was concerned about the concealment Benner's Hill offered for a surprise attack upon his flank. This may be concluded by the mere fact that Early sent Smith there in the first place.

Slocum will always draw criticism for his inactivity at Two Taverns around noon on July 1. Even so, there is room yet for a reasonable defense of him on this issue. It should be remembered that the central fault found with Slocum at noon was his unwillingness to follow Napoleon's Military Maxim of "when in doubt, march to the sound of the guns." And, because it is understood today that annual Fourth of July fireworks demonstrations in Gettysburg are discernable from Two Taverns, it is natural to presume that Slocum heard the guns and ignored them.

However, there was nothing to hear at noon on July 1, 1863. From 11:15 A.M. until perhaps 1:30 P.M., there was a lull in the battle. The question then is how far along the Baltimore pike were the 12<sup>th</sup> Corps columns between 10 A.M. and 11:15 A.M., when the battle was in full swing. The answer would involve many factors, including terrain, foliage, and atmospheric conditions. All in all, it is another topic for another article. The concern of this article has been to raise awareness of the significant actions that Slocum *did* take on July 1, 1863, to secure the stability of Meade's army. Slocum accomplished this task in fine fashion.



***Veterans of Winegar's Battery M, 1<sup>st</sup> New York Artillery at their monument dedication, June 18, 1889. Note how open the northern crest of Power's Hill is. GNMP***

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Frederic Shriver Klein, ed., *Just South of Gettysburg: Carroll County, Maryland in the Civil War* (Westminster, Maryland: Historical Society of Carroll County), 110.

<sup>2</sup> George Gordon Meade, *With Meade at Gettysburg* (Philadelphia: MOLLUS, 1930), 87.

<sup>3</sup> *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster Inc., 1991), 47.

<sup>4</sup> Captain George A. Thayer, "Gettysburg As We Men On The Right Saw It – Speech Read on May 5, 1886," in, Ken Brady and Florence Freeland, eds., *The Gettysburg Papers* (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Press, 1978), 2:804.

<sup>5</sup> George A. Cobham, Jr., "Letter of August 13, 1863 to Captain Thomas H. Elliot," in *The War-Time Letters of Colonel George A. Cobham, Jr. 111<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Infantry, 13 February 1862 to 17 July 1864* (Warren, Pennsylvania: Warren County Historical Society, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> U. S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1889) [Hereafter cited as *OR*], 27 (1): 825.

<sup>7</sup> Captain Charles P. Horton to John Bachelder, January 23, 1867, in David L. and Audrey J. Ladd, eds., *The Bachelder Papers* (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Press, 1994), 1:291-292.

<sup>8</sup> *OR*, 27 (1): 872.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Klein, ed., *Just South of Gettysburg*, 122.

<sup>11</sup> Henry J. Hunt, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York: Castle Books, 1956), 3: 296.

<sup>12</sup> Meade, *With Meade at Gettysburg*, 99.

<sup>13</sup> Harry W. Pfanz, *Gettysburg: Culp's Hill and Cemetery Hill* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 97.

<sup>14</sup> Ladd and Ladd, *The Bachelder Papers*, 291-292.

<sup>15</sup> *OR*, 27(1):825.

<sup>16</sup> David L. and Audrey J. Ladd, eds., *John Bachelder's History of the Battle of Gettysburg* (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside Press, 1997), 358.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.

<sup>18</sup> *OR*, 27(1):777.

<sup>19</sup> Brady and Freeland, *The Gettysburg Papers*, 2:820.

<sup>20</sup> Ladd and Ladd, eds., *The Bachelder Papers*, 1:213.

<sup>21</sup> Ladd and Ladd, eds., *John Bachelder's History of the Battle of Gettysburg*, 358.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *OR*, 27(1):777.

<sup>24</sup> Ladd and Ladd, eds., *The Bachelder Papers*, 213.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Pfanz, *Gettysburg: Culp's Hill and Cemetery Hill*, 77.

<sup>27</sup> Campbell Brown, "Brown-Ewell Papers," Nashville: Tennessee State Library and Archives, copy Gettysburg National Military Park Library, vertical files 5 – Participant Accounts - Campbell Brown.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Jubal A. Early, "A Review by General Early," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, (Richmond, Virginia: Southern Historical Society, December 1877, reprinted Millwood, New York: Kraus Reprint Company, 1977), 4:255.

<sup>30</sup> Ladd and Ladd, eds., *The Bachelder Papers*, 213.

<sup>31</sup> Brady and Freeland, *The Gettysburg Papers*, 2:820.

<sup>32</sup> William A. Frassanito and Elwood Christ, *The Daniel Lady Farm and the Battle of Gettysburg* (Gettysburg: Gettysburg Battlefield Preservation Association, 1999), 6.

<sup>33</sup> Ladd and Ladd, eds., *The Bachelder Papers*, 213.

<sup>34</sup> John Bachelder, "1876 2<sup>nd</sup> Day's Battle Map – Lady Farm Area," Gettysburg National Military Park, Map Collection, Cyclorama Center.

<sup>35</sup> Jubal A. Early, "A Review by General Early," *Southern Historical Society Papers*, vol. IV, 255

<sup>36</sup> Ladd and Ladd, eds., *The Bachelder Papers*, 213.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Ladd and Ladd, eds., *John Bachelder's History of the Battle of Gettysburg*, 357-358.

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 357.

<sup>40</sup> Captain Frank M. Myers of Company A, 35<sup>th</sup> Virginia Cavalry, The Comanches: A History Of White's Battalion, Virginia Cavalry (Baltimore, Maryland: Kelly, Piet & Co., Publishers, 1871 - Reprinted in Gaithersburg, Maryland: Butternut Press, Inc., 1987), pp. 196-197.